DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 636. RC 016 106

AUTHOR Fleury, Stephen C.; Mallan, John T.
TITLE Proposal: Rural Policy Studies Skills.
PUB DATE Oct 86
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Rural and Small Schools Consortium (Bellingham, WA, October 7-10, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Development; *Community Study; High School Seniors; Inquiry; Inservice Teacher Education; *Local Issues; Logical Thinking; Political Issues; Program Proposals; *Public Education; *Public Policy; *Rural Development; Rural Education; Secondary Education; Skill Development; *Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS New York; Policy Analysis; *Policy Research

ABSTRACT

A proposed project would develop a rural policy studies program for high school seniors in northern New York State. The program would deal with value positions as they pertain to the improvement of social conditions, use a variety of sources and kinds of knowledge, emphasize development and use of thinking skills, and concentrate on how knowledge is dealt with in a democracy. Study topics would be drawn from local rural economic and social issues such as labor market fluctuations, changes in national dairy policies, Native American business impact, shutdown of industrial plants, and the chronically rural poor. Program implementation would include training 10-15 area social studies teachers in policy studies through doing policy research. Next, these same teachers would develop and teach a course involving high school seniors in doing rural policy research. Inservice training would be offered to help teachers develop strategies and materials for learning to do logical and statistical analysis on rural issues. Student research results could be useful in rural community development efforts. The proposal points out ways in which a policy studies program differs from other academic areas in schools and emphasizes beneficial short- and long-term effects of merging policy studies techniques, public education, and rural community development. (LFL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED280636

PROPOSAL: RURAL POLICY STUDIES SKILLS

By

Stephen C. Fleury
and
John T. Mallan

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Stephen C. Fleury

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

X Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Rural and Small Schools Consortium (Bellingham, WA, October 7-10, 1986).

RC016106

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Dr. Stephen C. Fleury
Assistant Professor
State University of New York
at Oswego
Oswego, New York 13126

Dr. John T. Mallan
Social Studies Chair
Syracuse University
Syracuse, New York 13210

Proposal:

Rural Policy Studies Skills

Rationale

In rural areas in the United States, various farm organizations have been traditionally concerned with rural community and economic development. The Grange's efforts were unique in using an educative, as well as a policy, approach to community issues. Social conditions have drastically changed since the peak influence of the Grange in the early part of the twentieth century. The technological revolution in agriculture and industry has brought about shifting patterns of population and of the way people meet their needs in rural society. (Indeed, what is perceived as a "need" in rural areas as a result of this change is a policy issue itself.) And, in large measure, the abilities of the Grange to educate and to meet the contemporary needs of rural community development have been made somewhat obsolete: the "centralization tendency" of modern institutions places much of the real power over local issues into a larger social arena. Rural leadership needs more sophisticated policy studies skills in order to effectively operate in this new social arena.

Centralized public education is a case in point in how "power" has shifted from the local area. Other than vocational and technical courses on rural trades, little evidence suggests that the standard rural curriculum involves students in studying their own "ruralness" in an increasingly urbanized economic order. One might argue that the values, ideas, and skills developed in public education reflect the reactive needs of an urbanized, industrialized society, not the needs and concerns of a changing rural-urban relationship. The role of public education may be crucial in the direction, significance, and effect of rural economic development programs.

Recent literature on rural development efforts point out two

significant factors for successful community development: (1) consistent introduction of new information, and (2) citizen participation in gathering this information. While many rural sociologists contend that new information is the "principal mechanism for keeping communities...socially vigorous and adaptive" (Knop & Knop, 1982), Senator Patrick Leahy from Vermont has stated that "one of the key factors inhibiting rural development is poor data and lousy information" (1979). And merely "more information" is not sufficient to serve the ends of community development. A different approach to knowledge is called for. Daryl J. Hobbs (1980) suggests that rural developers need to democratize knowledge--to help rural citizens to be aware of its impact on the larger socio-economic-political framework as well as on the local level. Knop and Knop (1982) argue that community adaptation and development is enhanced by involving citizens in the processes and activities of rural researchers. Citizen involvement in gathering, generating, and analyzing knowledge relevant to social issues not only de-mystifies it (and makes it more accessible), but fosters community commitment through such participation. They state

> The more confidence and competence citizens acquire with the process, the less likely they are to be overloaded by new information and experience and the more likely they will be to join community processes as participants. These contribute to citizens' preserving their prerogatives and perhaps even regaining some of the management control they have relinquished or had usurped. This, in fact, is the essence of community development(p.34).

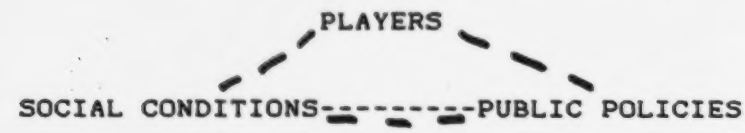
Although the authors of this quotation are speaking to professional social science researchers, their argument addresses the unique need for policy studies education in rural school districts. We propose a research development model for rural areas which merges policy studies techniques, public education, and rural community development.

Policy Studies and Public Education

A policy studies program in the school is an effort to apply skills and knowledge systematically and reflectively on policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. It involves an effort to focus on what and how levels of government address policy issues. Policy issues are real, controversial, and <u>not</u> neatly defined before study commences. They are not merely exercises for students to discover pre-determined "right" answers. A good example of a policy issue which might be studied is the controversy surrounding cigarette advertising. The main issue concerns the health of citizens versus individual choice;

it is unsettled, public, and has identifiable groups directly involved to influence the outcome (R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, American Newspaper Publishers Association, National Advisory Council on Drug Abuse,...). There are associated issues of taxes, public health, design and use of studies purportedly following scientific methodologies, economies of particular geographic areas, etc. As with most policy issues, the amount of information can be overwhelming. There is a need for a basic conceptual framework to provide basic categories for collecting, organizing, and using data. The following provides such a framework:

Conceptual Framework for Organizing
Public Policy Issues Information



In this context, the word "player" has a specific meaning. Abstract groups such as "the public" or "the voting public" or "taxpayers" are not considered players. While all of the above may have a broad view of what is liked or not liked regarding governmental action, the player goes beyond a broad view and consciously works to shape the purposes, scope, timing, and implementation of a particular public policy. An elected official, an interest group, an appointed official, a lobbyist, or any individual or group seeking to shape intentionally public policy is considered a player. Another thing to note is that the conceptual framework acts as a system. Both the concept of player and the concept of system play important roles in developing a program designed to study policy.

A number of characteristics differentiates a policy studies program from other academic areas in the schools (Yates, 1977):

- A policy studies program is an effort to understand how the policy system really works--how different actors, different contexts, and a variety of resources and values are inextricably related.

- The problems encountered in policy studies are not abstract classroom problems, but rather appear all about us. The answers do not pre-exist in a textbook or the teachers mind.

- Policy studies deal with values and ask how certain actions can improve (or at least maintain) what is desired. Value issues in policy studies are made public.

- Policy studies does not stop with arm-chair speculation and academic prescription. Rather, specific policy objectives are noted and ranked, alternative programs and policies are designed and weighed, and the cost and benefits regarding policy outcomes are evaluated.

- The policy studies student develops a wide range of knowledge, skills, and competency areas. Rather than learning to take a narrow and specialized approach to any one policy issue, the student learns to use specialized knowledge from different academic areas when studying policy issues.

- Policy studies uses both substantive and procedural types of knowledge. Its content includes not only factual data about topics and events, but also data and information about the cognitive skills used in the study. This is a key part of the program. Skills are deliberately taught as knowledge and are self-consciously applied.

- The student of policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation must deal with specific skill areas: content analysis; categorizing, elementary, logical analysis, historical interpretation, etc.

- Policy studies is multi-disciplinary. The study or use of a single academic area such as history or sociology is insufficient to gain the needed understanding. Policy studies attempts to synthesize the learning derived from previous social studies offerings and other school courses.

Conceptual Framework for Public Education

Recently the New York State Regents, in an attempt to stimulate and increase participatory citizenship, mandated a fourth year of social studies in the high schools. Their purpose was both to sensitize students to public policy issues and to develop student skills in studying these issues. Collaborating with Dr. William Coplin and Dr. Michael O'Leary from the Maxwell School for Citizenship and Public Affairs, we developed the conceptual framework for this course. In addition to creating a broad instructional outline, we provided substantive content and skill concepts, materials to show alternative uses of content, identified alternative sources of content (e.g., local newspapers), indicated sequenced approaches to learning activities, suggested techniques for building and testing substantive and skill concepts and alternative approaches to

student evaluation.

The broad instructional outline includes four areas of possible emphasis: (1) Conceptualizing the Study of Public Policy (components of public policy issues, value conflicts and public policy, and uses of policy analysis); (2) Basic Tools for the Study of Public Policy (library, developing current data through interviews and surveys, descriptive statistics); (3) Planning for Participation (formulating policy positions,assessing policy implementation, evaluating policy alternatives); (4) Participating in Public Policy (the citizen as office holder, comparing public policy analysis, communicating policy analysis, critiquing public policy communication--media.).

Policy Studies and Rural Community Development

We propose to train local high school social studies teachers to identify and systematically study rural policy issues which impinge upon the economic and social development of their area. We are positing a functional relationship between rural education and rural development. By making this relationship more formal, such a project, we feel, would result in a number of beneficial short and long-term effects for rural development:

- In addition to rural teachers becoming a professional source of knowledge about rural issues and policy skills, their influence on many students through public education will likely have a "multiplier effect" for rural leadership and development.

- This effort can serve as a prototype for rural school districts in developing courses consistent with the resurging national emphasis on "civics", "government", or the "American political system." For example, because of the recently mandated twelfth grade policy studies curriculum in New York State, several teachers have already requested inservice training to prepare for the start of the course in 1988. Given the limited resources, money, and time of rural school districts, past experiences reveal that unless interested parties intervene, many districts will depend upon a standardized textbook or "packaged curriculum." When interested parties have supplied financial and curriculum support in the past, the curriculum tends to reflect this support. Unless a unique and viable rural policy studies approach is demonstrated, the curriculum of rural public schools will probably remain with

little concern in analyzing and studying their own social context.

- In addition to developing cognitive policy studies skills, students will become familiar with rural public policy issues and their relationship to larger societal structures and forces. Students with policy study tools and a base of knowledge about the processes of the rural economy may be more likely to seek and create employment within the area to utilize their skills.

- The immediate and long-term results from the studies of this project may surface questions of rural economic policies not usually given attention by local leaders and policy players.

- Whether high-school graduates develop career interests as rural sociologists, rural economists, or rural developers will not be the sole measure of the effectiveness of a program. If graduates remain in the rural area upon graduation, they will provide a well-prepared pool of rural leadership; if they migrate to urban centers, they will serve as an informal educative effort for rural concerns.

- Through the support of local organizations (e.g. the Grange), the efforts and findings of the individual studies could be publicized locally and statewide. Although some findings may be potentially sensitive to local leaders, over time they can provide valuable background data and address serious questions concerning local plans for rural development.

- A successfully instituted and publicized project can have ramifications reaching far beyond the results of a single study or article. As a formal, relevant, and useful part of the curriculum, "rural development" could become a familiar social topic and concern of public education rather than just a "social problem."

- Securing the support of farm and rural organizations could contribute to the local "legitimacy" of this effort...as well as provide an appropriate and contemporary means for these organizations to contribute to the development of rural areas.

Resource Context for Rural Studies: A Case Study

Rural areas are full of topics for policy study. On a national level, the most obvious contemporary policy issues surround the effects of the changes in farm legislation--price supports, quota systems, loan supports, etc. Other related topics are quality of life issues, suicide increases, increase in crime rates, decrease in farm numbers but increase in farm size, change in womens' roles, effects of part-time farming on the economic structure, decrease of educational funding, concern for the well-being of the elderly and the effects of migrant employment. This list is not exhaustive nor applicable for all rural areas, but it does suggest a variation of rural topics deserving policy study. The following case study is an example from a rural area with which we are most familiar.

Franklin, Clinton, and St. Lawrence Counties are at the northernmost tip of New York State. According to the 1980 census, each county shows different population growth rates over the past seventy years. While the number of people in Franklin County remained virtually the same at 45,000, St. Lawrence County increased by 28% to 114,300 and Clinton County by 70% to 81,000. The cultural make-up of this area primarily descends from White, New England origins, although a large proportion are of French Canadian extract. Native American residents of the Awkwasasne reservation make up 5% of Franklin County's population.

Although the major industrial plants of the area are Alcoa, Reynolds Aluminum, and General Motors, lifestyles and occupations are primarily dependent on agriculture. Unemployment rates in these counties average between 11% to 13%, according to the season. General Motors recently announced the closing of their plant in 1988, putting 1300 workers in precarious employment. The well-being and prosperity of farmers (and of other residents) in this area seem of lesser quality than that of similar agricultural areas in New York State or areas immediately across the Canadian Border. The apparent differences in conditions of these areas may have a lot to do with the proximity to urban centers. Montreal, Quebec is less than an hour's travel from Canadian rural areas adjacent to the Border, while the largest urban center to serve the three Northern New York counties is Plattsburgh, located on the eastern border of New York State in Clinton County. Just as the existence of Montreal may positively influence rural development for Southern rural Quebec, the existence of Plattsburgh may make economic conditions in Clinton County different from Franklin and St. Lawrence counties. But this is an empirical question for policy studies.

Study Topics

This area is ripe for studies concerning rural economic and social development. The rural economy of Northern New York is indicative of the influence of various structural changes of the larger state and national economy. Labor markets go through drastic changes in response to small construction projects relative to other areas of the country; Local service businesses rise and fall according to "slight" changes in national dairy farm policy; The prosperity of stores in this region varies according to the exchange rate for Canadian money--some years Canadians gain the advantage, some years New Yorkers do. Policies concerning Native Americans impact on outlying areas. Some indications of this are the amount of federal and state support for educational services, the attracting of "gasoline and cigarette customers" away from their immediate locales to the Reservation because of the availability of tax-free goods, and the income generated from the large commercial Bingo Halls recently appearing on sovereign native American territory. Because the three industrial plants in St. Lawrence County are the greatest source of factory work, a lay-off of a few hundred workers at a plant has a major impact on all proximate communities. The future shutdown of the General Motors plant will likely create social and economic effects of a crisis proportion for some segments of the North Country. And Northern New York is not without the chronically rural poor. Both public assistance and unemployment rates are above average for New York State. In addition to the income problems facing the elderly elsewhere in the United States, many traditional community occupations are no longer open to residents of all ages in this rural area. Pockets of income differences are visible both <u>within</u> and <u>between</u> local communities. There is no derth of topics to study in Northern New York.

Training by Doing

A rural policy studies program for the Northern New York region, as well as any rural area, could be established in a number of different ways. One possible manner would be to first train ten to fifteen area social studies teachers in policy studies through <u>doing</u> rural policy research. Next, these same teachers could then develop and teach (in process) a course involving high school seniors in <u>doing</u> rural policy research. It

is quite likely that arrangements could be made for teachers to receive the initial training and graduate credits from a local university.

The training of the teachers and the students would first involve them in a survey of public policy tools. This survey would develop the conceptual and analytical skills to analyze public policy issues. The class activities would help teachers identify different types of public policy issues, to recognize components of public policy issues (the players, the social conditions, and the policies), and to separate different types of public and private interests on any issue. Teachers will become familiar with different types of policy study approaches and purposes, e.g., as an analysis for monitoring, forecasting, or prescribing. Different sources and methodologies will be explored. After an immersion in rural development literature, both historic and sociological, the teachers will identify specific research questions reflecting topics of concern and relevancy in their particular areas. After identifying their research questions, the teachers will design and implement a policy study on a rural issue. A requirement for the successful completion of the course would be for the teacher to publicly present his or her findings.

After the teachers have become familiar with policy studies approaches and with rural issues, teachers would need inservice training to develop instructional strategies and materials for use with their high school students. Teachers would develop activities to involve students in learning how to do both logical and statistical analysis on rural issues. The high school students would be familiarized by the teachers with public policy studies skills and would have experiences in various analytical activities prior to completing a major policy study for the course. A culminating activity of the course would be the collecting and packaging of the rural policy studies designed by the teachers and students. The collection of "findings" could be submitted for local publication and made available to local leaders and libraries. Once rural policy studies courses became widespread, a journal for these studies could be initiated.

Summary

A rural policy studies program for high school seniors would serve educational, social, and rural development ends. In an age of impersonal science, it deals with values and value positions as it attempts to improve social conditions. It calls upon the use of knowledge from different academic and non-academic areas. It uses a variety of sources and kinds of knowledge, and

approaches knowledge in a unique manner. And the emphasis on the development and use of thinking skills ensures that its effects on students are transferable to other areas of their lives. The effort to concentrate on how we deal with knowledge in a democracy points out the positive effect of policy studies programs in rural schools. Daryl Hobbs, a rural sociologist, states

> We speak frequently of influencing 'policy makers' with the implication that they are highly placed officials; less concern seems to be directed to supplying applicable and relevant information to the non-officials whose judgments and actions in a democratic system are the determinants of 'development' and to the effectiveness of 'development' programs and policies (p.22).

A policy studies program in rural schools would be a good start in addressing this concern.

References

Hobbs, Daryl J.
1980 "Rural Development: Intentions and Consequences." Rural Sociology 45 (Spring):7-25.

Knop, Ed and Knop, Sheila.
1982 "The New Information Effect in Community Participation: Implications for Academic Research and Service Roles." The Rural Sociologist 2:28-35.

Leahy, Patrick J.
1979 "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society." Burlington, Vermont, August 23. Newsline 7:5-8.